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SOURCE Aj.LIVESTOCK IN INDIA

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Summary: India has a total of 262 million head of livestock and tens of millions of poultry. Progress in the livestock industry is hampered both by the numbers involved and the substandard practices of farm communities.

Hides and leather play an important role in the Indian economy in terms of domestic and foreign trade. Large-scale efforts, however, are yet to be taken in this respect.

The livestock industry faces four pressing needs to lift it from its present backwardness: better breeds, adequate nutrition, disease control, and government assistance.

As far as figures are concerned, India has more livestock than any other country in the world. There are approximately 136 million head of cattle and about 40 million head of buffalo in India, which constitutes about one fourth of the total livestock count of the world. In addition, there are 37 million head of sheep, 46 million goats, and 3 million other animals such as horses, donkeys, mules, etc. Furthermore, there are tens of millions of poultry.

The livestock problem is considerable, even in terms of sheer numbers. The problem increases in extent and complexity in considering the variety of outmoded practices and beliefs about animal husbandry which prevail in every part of the country.

In contrast to livestock owners of other lands, the average Indian farmer, besides being poor and illiterate, probably owns only 2 head of cattle. Statistics, however, show that transactions in livestock reach 4 billion rupees

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each year. Their effects on India's domestic and foreign trade, in terms of the actual value of labor and products derived, are tremendous. India stands first in the world market as an exporter of hides and leather. India is also an exporter of high-quality woolen rugs. Domestic trade figures are meager, but it has been noted that about 1,021 fairs are held annually throughout India, and 11,000 animals, on the average, are bought and sold during each fair. Approximately 272,000 head of cattle, between 2 and 5 million maunds (one maund varies from 25 to 82 pounds in various parts of India) of bones, 3 million maunds of skin and hides, 600,000 maunds of leather, and more than 700,000 maunds of ghee (clarified butter) are transported over rail and waterways for interstate commerce. No figures are available for the quantity of goods carried on roads and highways, but it is also thought to be large.

The proper method of raising cattle is an important part in improving the standards of the livestock industry in India. There are any number of factors in this connection, but the most pressing requirements at present include breeding facilities, adequate food supply, disease control, and government assistance.

One of the most pressing needs of the Indian livestock industry today is the problem of providing better breeding facilities to improve the strain of cattle. The adoption of scientific methods of breeding will develop a high-quality, disease-resistant type of cattle in this country. Livestock farmers need a large number of pedigree or high-grade bulls, since only one bull is available where 250 of them are required at present. In numerous areas of the country, the bulls are small and practically sterile.

The problem of obtaining an adequate supply of feed for livestock is also pressing. The total amount of feed available in the country is enough for only half the number of animals. Most of the grass that grows in the forest during the monsoons is not utilized.

The matter of disease control is another important requirement. Livestock diseases are rampant because the farmers have not cooperated in maintaining sanitary measures on their farms. They usually object to sanitation advice and frequently claim that the time to act is when a disease has been detected. Farmers throughout India lose about 300,000 head of cattle each year as a result of their ignorance in combating these infectious diseases.

A number of the present ills of the livestock industry could be eased by government assistance. Article 48 of the Indian Constitution provides that the several states shall establish modern and scientific methods of agriculture and animal husbandry and shall take special precautions against unnecessary slaughter of calves, milk cows, draft animals, etc., from the standpoint of the conservation of stronger breeds.

The departments of animal husbandry in the various states, in accordance with the provisions of one Constitution, maintain a competent staff of experts who are endeavoring to foster enlightened practices and cooperation on the village level. These departments have established state centers to provide information on breeding cattle and combating infectious diseases. They also sponsor frequent fairs and exhibitions to increase the people's knowledge of current advances in the livestock industry.

The central government also maintains research centers to improve the quality of livestock in India. The Indian Veterinary Research Institute is the largest agency conducting investigations on artificial insemination, feed, and diseases of livestock. It also has a research section dealing with the poultry industry. The Indian Dairy Research Institute in Bangalore handles problems of the dairy industry. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research coordinates research between the research bodies of the central government and of the several states.

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These various research agencies are doing a remarkable job of introducing modern methods to the farmers of India. It is also true, however, that they cannot competently fulfill all of the requirements of the industry, because it has also been demonstrated that there are vast differences in the conditions which exist on the village level as compared with the ideal conditions of the experimental farms.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research has, therefore, devised the Key Villages Scheme for the benefit of the Indian farmer. Under this system, one bull per 500 head of cattle is maintained for breeding purposes at a centrally designated village. The government also extends financial assistance to farmers to encourage them to form village cooperatives. In this way, the government hopes to secure for the villagers cattle which will compare favorably with those of the state farms, through proper instructions in breed selection, taking a count of cattle, calculating milk production, estimating the availability of fodder, branding, etc.

A group of ten villages near Delhi have been organized under this scheme.

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